

Chapter 6

ASIAN EMPIRES, CHRISTIAN TRADES

Aqui o soberbo imperio, que se afama
Com terras, e riqueza não cuidada,
Da China corre, e ocupa o senhorio
Desde Tropico ardente ao Cinto frio . . .
Esta mea escondido que responde
De longe aa China donde vem buscarse,
He Iapão, onde nace a prata fina,
Que illustrada sera coa Ley diuina.

*'The Background of Eastern Seapower'*¹

The timing of the European arrival in the China Sea was fortunate, for Europeans: in effect they entered a power vacuum, occupied only by small trading city-states and by pirates. Central to the international relations of the region was the Chinese tributary system; but this was no longer backed, as it had been, by a very considerable, highly organised and effective naval power. Nor was it translated effectively into Chinese commercial power; there were of course many Chinese merchants in the ports of the 'Southern Seas', some of them long settled there, but their activities were unofficial, as it were extra-legal, and often, from the Imperial point of view, actually illicit. However, a concept analogous to the 'factory', the alien merchant community extra-territorial as regards its own administration and (within limits) its law, though not so in sovereignty, was as indigenous in Asia as it was in the Europe of the Hansa and of the Genoese and Venetian colonies of the Levant.² This greatly eased initial commercial penetration; but in dealings with major powers—Mughal India, China, Japan—it meant that European activity was not so much imposed on them, as it often appears in Eurocentric histories, as infiltrated into them, on Asian terms and sometimes under severe restrictions. It was often otherwise with the pettier states of Southeast Asia, a geopolitical fracture-zone.³

This setting largely conditioned the mechanisms of European trade, and some account of it (perforce too brief and hence over-simple) is needed for the 'placing' of a drama which in the West is still too often seen as simply the forceful and picturesque activity of the European protagonists. Forceful and

Luis de Camões, *Os Lusíadas*, X. 129, 131: 'Here stretches the proud empire which boasts of lands and riches yet unknown, China, holding dominion from the burning Tropic to the frigid zone . . . This [isle] half-hidden, lying far off against China, whence it must be sought, is Japan, where the fine silver is born, soon to be illuminated by the divine Law'.

picturesque it indeed was, but the action was moulded by the setting of the stage and the reactions, often themselves very forceful, of other actors in the play.

Centuries before Portuguese keels first furrowed the Indian Ocean, or even the Atlantic, Chinese ship-building and maritime activities, especially in the southeastern provinces of Fukien and Kuangtung, had reached a much higher pitch than European technology and organisation were to attain until well into the sixteenth century. Chinese ships sailed to Java in the fifth century of our era; in the thirteenth the prolonged resistance of the Southern Sung dynasty to the Mongol invasions was largely a naval affair, with some remarkable technological developments; and the anti-Mongol revolt of 1348 in sea-oriented Fukien was essentially a naval campaign, intercepting the convoys of rice and tribute to northern China. The Mongol Emperor Kublai Khan mounted full-scale overseas expeditions against Japan (a disastrous failure), Champa or Annam, and Java (another failure). Already in Sung times ocean-going ships could exceed 500 tons burthen and may have reached twice that size; Marco Polo and Ibn Battutah were mightily impressed by, amongst other things, the individual cabins, sixty or more in the larger ships, with some private baths—which would have been difficult indeed to find on European vessels before the passenger liners of the later nineteenth century. Archaeological evidence, including an 11-metre long rudder post, indicates that by Cheng Ho's time (1405–31) the greatest Treasure Ships were at least 100–150 metres long and of 2500 tons burthen, 3100 displacement, approaching the practicable limit of wooden-hulled sailing ships in the nineteenth century.⁴

The Chinese were very probably in contact with East Africa by the tenth century (as suggested by finds of 'Chinese porcelain by the shovelful' and by an intriguing reference in Idrisi (c. 1154)); there is a near-certainty that Cheng Ho's ships sailed into the Mozambique Channel, and even a possibility that they rounded the Cape of Good Hope from the east. Obviously these voyages, made by thousands of men in scores of ships, did not come out of the blue; they seem to have been essentially a reassertion and an extension by the new Ming dynasty of the Chinese suzerainty into which their predecessors the Mongols had brought all the organised kingdoms of Southeast Asia; it was obviously desirable for a new and native dynasty to demonstrate that its prestige was no less than that of the old. As an organiser of voyages Cheng Ho would seem *sans pareil*, as a navigator he must have ranked with Vasco da Gama and Magellan, with the single allowance (a large one) that north of Kilwa his voyages were by long-navigated seas to known ports. But surely he more than Columbus might claim the title 'Admiral of the Ocean Sea'.⁵

Unlike the Mongols, the Ming did not seek military expansion; the two or three warlike incidents which took place on Cheng Ho's voyages were just that, mere incidents. There may well have been an element of serious scientific enquiry into resources; but the voyages were also a form of disguised state trading:

the 'tribute' brought back included not only exotic rarities such as ostriches and 'the auspicious giraffe' but also fine timbers, copper, sulphur, spices, and (perhaps especially important) drugs. The counter-presentations were largely luxury or ceremonial *objets d'art*, easily spared by China but very flattering to the local rulers, who welcomed both the recognition and the display. This tributary relation, while bulking large in the minds of the rulers on both sides, seems to have had little practical effect except in kingdoms actually contiguous to China, such as Annam and Korea. After the Portuguese took Malacca, its refugee Sultan did indeed appeal to his overlord in Peking, but received at first a dusty answer, and no practical help; by this time the Ming court was preoccupied with the northern frontier.⁶ Sometimes the effects were negative: misunderstandings of the relationship—innocent, wilful, or generated by interested intermediaries—bedevilled Sino-Japanese negotiations during Hideyoshi's Korean wars.⁷

But this was after the decline of Ming sea-power, a decline more sudden than its rise and seemingly more difficult to explain. One factor was certainly the increasing involvement with revived Mongol power in the north—already in 1421 the capital was moved from Nanking to Peking; another the drying-up of special fiscal resources devoted to such expeditions. Cheng Ho himself was a Muslim eunuch; the voyages were sponsored by the Emperor personally and carried out by his eunuch-dominated household staff, and hence met with the bitter and effective hostility of the Confucian officials, who saw in this venturing overseas at once a departure from the agrarian polity rooted in ancient tradition,⁸ a drain of funds, and more power to the eunuchs, their hated rivals in Imperial counsels. The navy's prestige must have been weakened by several defeats in the successful revolt of the northern Vietnamese against the Chinese occupation of 1406–27. Needham points out also that the remodelling in 1411 of the centuries-old Grand Canal (1705 km from Hangchow to Peking, and still active today) fitted it for transport at all seasons, so that grain convoys by sea could now be dispensed with. The great ship-building capacity of littoral China was diverted to inland water transport; in 1431 the naval crews were set to transporting rice on the Canal, 'thus reducing them from fighting men to stevedores'.⁹

As a result of all these factors, even the record of Cheng Ho's achievement was so far as possible buried: when a later Ming Emperor showed some interest in reviving overseas enterprises, the files were officially 'lost'. The Ming navy, which in 1420 comprised some 3800 units, some very large—a force which would have made any contemporary European mind boggle—'simply fell to pieces by the end of the century', and in the next even private trading overseas was legally banned, though this was far from completely enforceable. Decidedly the Portuguese were lucky in their timing!¹⁰

Chinese maritime commerce did not cease with the end of official voyages; the eunuchs switched their capital into private ventures, and in the later fifteenth century there was some revival of trading enterprise. But it was increasingly

subject to official hostility; by 1500 it was (theoretically) death to build a three-masted sea-going junk; in 1551 it was decreed that those who went down to the sea in ships 'committed a crime analogous to espionage by communicating with foreigners'. As in Japan in the next century, this 'agoraphobic mentality' was basically motivated by a desire to maintain a pure polity, uncontaminated by dangerous alien thoughts and *mores*; the Great Wall played an analogous role *vis-à-vis* the nomads of the north. In both cases there was some rationale in exclusion.¹¹ For the Ming, it was a desperate attempt to cope with the virulent problem of piracy, a merely negative reaction once the positive solution of naval power had been scrapped; but as Spain was to find in her Spanish American empire, the result was erosion of control by smuggling: 'The Minister at Madrid' or Peking 'may give what orders he pleases . . . but still a people who want goods will find out ways for a supply. . . .'¹² In the fifteenth century legitimate maritime trade came to be dominated by two great entrepôts: Malacca in the Southern Seas and in the north the Ryukyu Islands, known to Europeans as the Lequeos or Loochoos or variants of that name.

Although Malaccan ships went as far as India and China, the Sultanate lacked capacity for building large vessels, as distinct from light war-craft, and seems on the whole to have been less a great trading-state in its own right than an emporium, for which its location was unrivalled: a good defensible harbour on a strait only 65 km wide, strategically situated in relation to the alternating monsoons of the Indian Ocean and the China Seas. This was 'the only point throughout the 8,000 miles [13,000 km] of the trade-route [between the Moluccas and the Mediterranean] at which a monopoly of spice distribution could be established'; for Tomé Pires, 'there is no doubt that Malacca is of such importance and profit that it seems to me it has no equal in the world'.¹³ By 1460 its Sultan held both shores of the Straits for some 700 km; such a position was not likely to escape the fine geopolitical eye of Afonso de Albuquerque, who duly took the town in 1511 and, as we have seen made of it the forward base whereby Spanish intrusions in the Spice Islands were thwarted.

As for the Ryukyuan, from the 1370s until the mid-sixteenth century they were 'self-made agents of entrepot trade'. They profited greatly when the expansionist atmosphere of Cheng Ho's day was succeeded by the Ming policy of inhibiting foreign trade; many Chinese merchants and seamen transferred themselves to the 'southern lands', and in fact most of the executive officers on Ryukyuan ships were of Chinese origin. Later, the Ryukyuan picked up the threads of Malayan trade, after the fall of Malacca to the Portuguese: Patani on the Gulf of Siam became an alternative entrepôt, and Siam was Ryukyu's most important trading partner in Southeast Asia. Chinese trade continued under the guise of tribute missions. The islands themselves produced sulphur and horses; their traders distributed to the 'Southern Seas' Chinese porcelain, silks, and other fine textiles, metal goods and drugs, and Japanese weaponry, lacquer, and gold. Returns included exotic beasts and birds, camphor, rhinoceros horn and other

materia medica, but especially dyewoods and spices, above all pepper, which sold in China at several hundred times the buying price.¹⁴

The Ryukyuan seem to have provided an element of stability and respectability in an often fluid and tricky half-diplomatic half-adventuring context. The trade was a royal monopoly, and it was for example to the advantage of Japanese traders, whether agents of the local lords of Kyushu or private merchants, first to carry Ryukyuan official envoys (trading in tributary guise) and later to act themselves as such, since both Chinese and Korean authorities were very ready, and not without reason, to see Japanese commerce as being compounded with piracy. But the increasing instability of the later sixteenth century, the decline in the effectiveness of Ming power with the resulting rise of smuggling and piracy, and finally the extension of Portuguese competition and even control, confined Ryukyuan trade to the more limited, though still profitable, role of carrier between China and Japan. Early in the seventeenth century the little kingdom became a vassal to the Shimazu, lords of Satsuma in Kyushu: but both sides played the dependency relation down so that Ryukyu could continue to act as a channel for Sino-Japanese trade, otherwise illegal from the expulsion of the Portuguese from Nagasaki in 1638 until a relaxation of the Chinese ban in 1684. There was even a secret manual for Ryukyuan going to China, who were instructed to fob off awkward questions by saying that their money and merchandise came from 'Treasure Island'. Probably nobody was much deceived, but appearances were preserved.

Japan's Wars of the Roses were also a Hundred Years' War: 'The Emperor in Kyoto sat powerless upon his throne, his shogun or generalissimo could exercise no authority over the regional lords'.¹⁵ This time of troubles, the 'Warring States', lasted from 1467 until 1568, when Oda Nobunaga, the first of the three unifiers of early modern Japan, occupied Kyoto and was able to dominate his rivals. As a State, therefore, and despite its population of 15–20,000,000, Japan hardly comes into the reckoning before Nobunaga; for example, St Francis Xavier made an arduous journey to Kyoto in 1550, seeking imperial favour for his mission, but soon realised that he must fall back on the local lords or *daimyo*.¹⁶ But if Japan did not count, Japanese did: they showed such interest in Western ways that they almost at once took rank, in European eyes, as the most 'civilisable' Asians—an elegant and intelligent people, 'the best who have yet been discovered', said Xavier. But they were also the tough cruel men who formed the core of the 'Wako', the pirates who scourged the coasts of eastern Asia before and after the periods of Mongol and Ming naval strength, and as such were 'not suffered to land in any port in India with weapons; being accounted a people so desperate and daring, that they are feared in all places where they come'.¹⁷ So early was the love-hate relationship born on both sides.

The century of turbulence which began in 1467 saw a slide into a completely decentralised feudalism, as a result of which 'The daimyo domain became in

essence a petty principality' where the lord ruled with 'only the haziest reference to . . . sanction from the Shogun and emperor.'¹⁸ At the same time, however, the wars themselves demanded supplies and servicing, and merchant communities were growing up in the interstices of feudal power; in a few cases they were approaching, rather distantly, the position of European free cities. The most notable were Hakata and especially Sakai, near Osaka, which for long was the main port for trade with Korea, Fukien, and the Ryukyus. Although obviously not so well placed for Korean trade as Hakata and Hirado on the Tshushima Straits, Sakai was closer to the heart of consuming Japan—the core area between Kyoto and Edo (now Tokyo)—and by going south of Shikoku and Kyushu its ships could avoid the petty pirates (protected by local daimyo) of the Inland Sea. The city could hold its own against the local lords; it was a centre of arms supply and had its own defences and its own oligarchic government by thirty-six senior merchants, and even after being forced to accept a governor from Nobunaga, it retained much significance under his successors Hideyoshi and Ieyasu—all three had a keen sense of trade values.¹⁹ Exports to China were copper, sulphur, craft work, and great numbers of swords; imports raw silk, porcelain, strings of cash, drugs, books. The trade was from a Chinese point of view a tributary one: the ships were despatched by the Japanese Emperor, the Shogun, great lords and monasteries, but their fitting-out and the business arrangements were in the hands (and much to the profit) of the Sakai and Hakata merchants. But this commerce was of course vulnerable to the increasing restrictiveness of Chinese policy, and by the 1540s it was collapsing, to be replaced by piracy on a grand scale.

The China Seas, with their multitude of coves and off-shore islands, were a highly favourable milieu for sea-bandits, and piracy was of great antiquity and endemic in times of turbulence. The decline of shogunal power allowed the daimyo of the west—especially of strategically located Kyushu—to take over the missions to China, officially tribute missions but *de facto* trading convoys. The Ming authorities naturally endeavoured to recognise only one mission at a time; rejected groups turned to smuggling, with the active connivance of Chinese merchants, increasingly inhibited in legal trade by official policy, and sometimes of the mandarins themselves. Thence it was but a short step to piracy.

In 1523 the quarrels of rival Japanese 'embassies' led to serious disorders, with the loss of Chinese lives and property, in Ningpo, the official port for trade with Japan; all trade with that country was forthwith prohibited. This absolute ban was relaxed, but the continually changing restrictions made the formerly licensed trade impracticable, smuggling and piracy increased, and eventually the Ming reacted by banning *all* sea-borne commerce, presumably on the principle of no trade, no pirates. Of course trade went on, but with no Chinese sea-power and no central control in Japan, it ceased to be merely illicit and became utterly lawless. Some daimyo found their account in co-operating with the pirates; the feudal wars provided plenty of daring leaders, whose crews were swelled

by the forcibly unemployed Chinese seamen, who in fact were numerically the great majority in the Wako gangs. By the 1540s Fukien and the region of the Yangtse delta (where the Chusan Islands were a handy base) were subject to pillage, rape and murder by the almost continuous incursions of bands

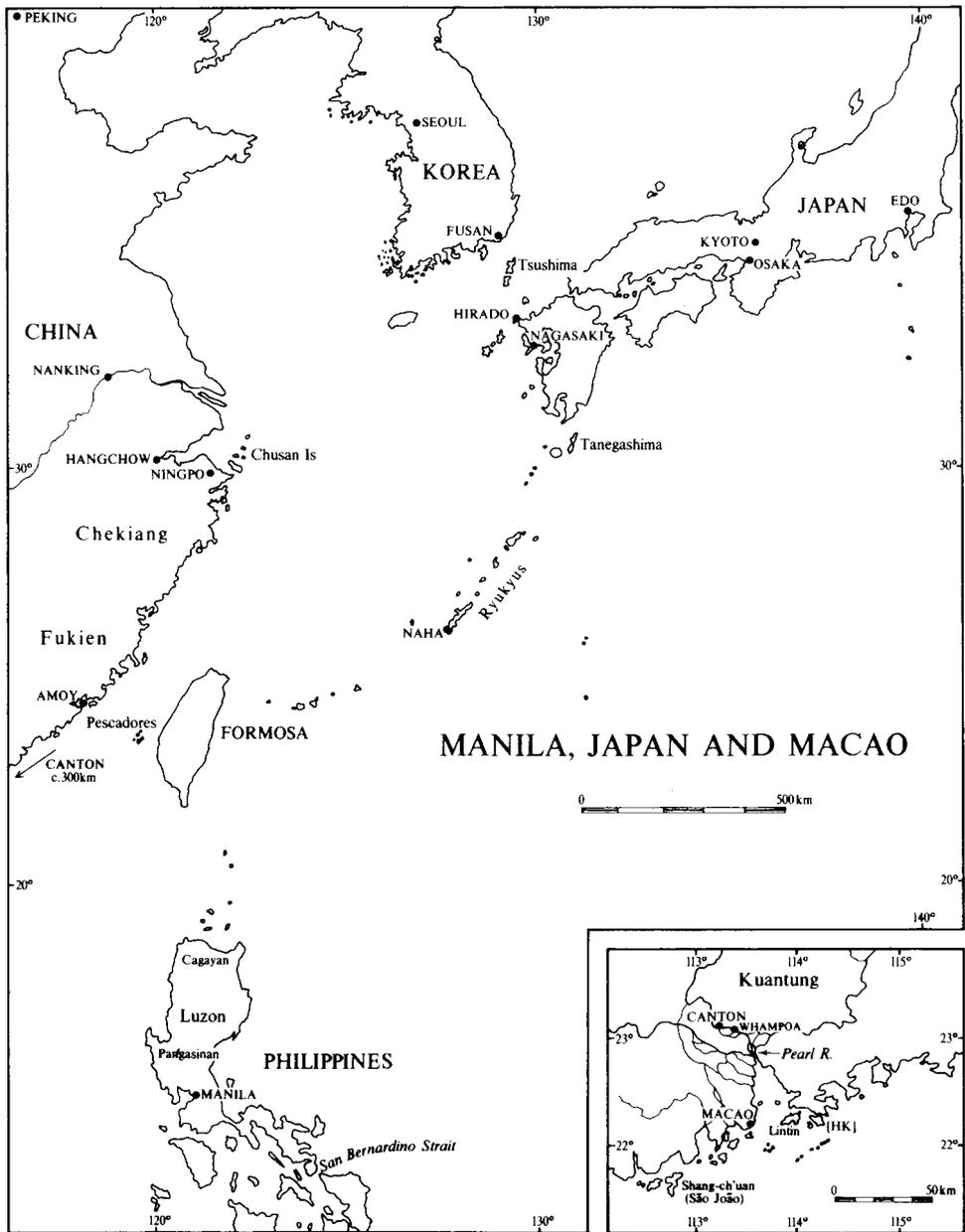


Figure 16. MANILA, JAPAN, MACAO

sometimes numbered in thousands; to such a pitch that some littoral areas were evacuated and a scorched earth policy adopted.²⁰ This was the milieu in which the Portuguese attempted the commercial penetration of China and Japan, and the evangelisation of the latter.

Macao and the 'Great Ship to Japon'

The monopoly of eastern trade by the Portuguese was not absolute even in theory; apart from the fact that illicit dealings by officials and others soon crept in, Asian as well as Portuguese merchants were licensed to trade, except in spices and a few other commodities, in the areas under Lusian dominance. Except for de Abreu's voyage of 1511–12 into the Indies and a mission to Siam in 1518, initial penetration beyond Malacca was by individual pioneers carried in Asian ships. In 1513 or 1514, soon after Francisco Serrão had thus reached the Moluccas, Jorge Alvares came in a junk to Lintin Island, about 100 km southwest of Canton and in the main embouchure of the great delta south of that city (Fig. 16), which was the official port for trading with southeast Asia as Ningpo was for Japan and Foochow for the Philippines. Once it was reported that 'there is a great a profit in taking spices to China as in taking them to Portugal', the Portuguese authorities in Malacca planned to open official relations; at the taking of that town, local Chinese merchants, at odds with the Sultan, had offered their help, and so the prospects of friendly trade were thought to be good.²¹

Accordingly a fleet was sent to Canton under Fernão Peres de Andrade, carrying Tomé Pires as ambassador to the Emperor; but a promising start was ruined by Fernão's brother Simão, who came out in 1519 and forthwith started building a fort, interfering with Asian shipping, and carrying off (or 'buying') young people. Initially the local officials seem to have covered up this outrage, against bribes, and Pires was allowed to proceed to Peking. But when more reliable news came through from Canton, the embassy collapsed: its staff was to be imprisoned until justice was done to the Sultan of Malacca, and trade was forbidden. Pires and his people died in captivity.

Nevertheless, the pepper and sandalwood brought by the Portuguese was highly desirable to the Cantonese, and two Malacca fleets arrived in 1521. The first did good business, but after orders came from Peking to expel the 'Of-lang-chi' (Feringhis or Franks) the second had to fight its way out. There was further fighting, in which the Portuguese were unsuccessful, in 1522, in which year Canton was officially closed to all foreign commerce. Ming naval forces were after all not entirely negligible, and the Portuguese feared and attack on Malacca itself. They gave over any more official visits, and the Chinese fitted out more ships. But these had more than enough to do in coping with local pirates; with closure of the port, customs duties ceased and local salaries fell into arrear; and there were no spices for the Court.²²

Vested interests—merchants, local gentry, some mandarins—favoured commerce with foreigners, and the Portuguese continued to trade, illicitly, around

the Bay of Amoy and at Ningpo, hovering off-shore, camping on islands, and using Malay or Siamese front men. Law enforcement varied from province to province and from time to time; a forceful counter-attack in 1547–8 by Chu Wan, Viceroy of Fukien and Chekiang, on the smugglers, banditti, and pirates (who included some Fo-lang-chi) was successful initially, until local resentments and intrigue led to his fall and suicide: his hard line had completely alienated ‘a large group of disciplined, tough men’, used to the sea, and their friends—local officials, gentry, and consumers—who found their account in a live-and-let-live policy. Chu Wan ‘rais[ed] the level of antagonism from that of smuggling to that of piracy’,²³ and the next decade saw the devastating razzias at their height: in 1555 the Wako penetrated well beyond Nanking, over 300 km inland. Piracy shaded off into trade and *vice versa*: one Wako chief, the Chinese salt merchant Wang Chih, driven from the Chusan Islands by Chu Wan, based himself at Hirado and supplemented piracy with a large more or less licit business with the Southern Seas, especially in sulphur, important for textile industries as well as explosives. He was taken by a trick and executed in 1559, and in the 1560s major piracy subsided, though it long continued on a smaller scale. Against this background of ferocious anarchy, the Portuguese reputation as the violent disruptors of peaceful Asian trade, perhaps true enough for the Indian seas, must surely look a little different in those of China.

Three factors were important in the decline of piracy: in China, sensible relaxation of the prohibitions, which led to some revival of Chinese shipping; in Japan, the renewal of central control under Nobunaga—the first of these took away much of the *raison d’être* of illicit commerce, and both cut down recruitment to the Wako; finally the legitimation, within limits, of Portuguese trade, since the light Wako craft could not cope so easily with their solid well-armed ships. Indeed, one element in the eventual allowance to the Portuguese of a settlement near Canton may well have been their usefulness in putting down local pirates.

Since direct Sino-Japanese trade had never recovered from the Chinese embargo of 1523—the Japanese reputation for violence was such that they were banned again in 1579, 1599 and 1624, after which they shut themselves out—there was a place for the middleman, as the Ryukyuan had seen; and should the Portuguese secure the necessary base beyond Malacca, instead of having to make do with off-shore trading and precarious island camps, there would then be nothing to prevent them from entering and eventually dominating the carrying trade. Even so, indigenous Asian trading continued and even thrived, but often by avoiding Portuguese ports—in the long run, a weakening of Lusian economic strength through the fall-off in customs and port revenues.²⁴

In the face of Chu Wan’s offensive, the Portuguese in the 1550s began to shift their attention back to Kuangtung, where in 1530, as a result of local pressure, Canton had been reopened to foreign trade. The Fo-lang-chi were still excluded, though, as previously in Fukien and Chekiang, the connivance of local officials and merchants enabled them to conduct trade from the islands

of Shang-ch'uan (São João, where St Francis Xavier died in 1552) and Lang-pai-kau (Lanpacau), really on an annual fair basis, the temporary hutments being burnt at the end of the August-November trading season. In 1554 Leonel de Sousa secured permission for regular trade, paying customs dues, and by 1557 a town was growing up on the Bay of A-ma (most appropriately the goddess of seafarers), officially 'the City of the Name of God in China', in history Amacon, Macao, Macau (Plate XI).²⁵



Plate XI. MACAO, 1598. Obviously a stylised view, with a few concessions to local colour; note the absence of fortifications, very often the most conspicuous features in this type of illustration. From Theodore de Bry, *Indie orientalis* (Frankfort 1607). NLA.

The transaction was a verbal one, and indeed while the Portuguese ceased paying a rent in 1849, their sovereign rights were not fully admitted by China until 1887; but from the beginning Macao enjoyed a practical extra-territoriality. As Boxer says, 'the agreement suited both parties, and consequently had a much longer lease of life than one would expect from an oral arrangement made after much junketing on board the Portuguese flagship.' The reason for this is well put by Chang, in words nearly as applicable to the Hong Kong of 1957 as to the Macao of 1557:

[the Chinese authorities] saw their aim attained: they could now reap the benefits of foreign trade without either permitting foreigners to visit Canton or Chinese to leave their country. Here, right at the doorway of Canton, was a settlement of foreigners who eagerly took what China could offer to other countries, and brought to her what she needed from abroad on such terms as were favourable to her. On the other hand, however, the Chinese watched the mushroom growth [of Macao] with a certain amount of apprehension . . . At times the foreigners were treated with singular generosity and showered with rare favours, while at other times, they were suspected, closely watched and subjected to grotesque restrictions.²⁶

Meanwhile, between the first arrival off Canton and the founding of Macao, a new sphere of enterprise had been opened: in 1542 or 1543 three Portuguese adventurers had arrived, in a junk and by chance, at the island of Tanegashima, south of Kyushu.²⁷

The advantages of Portuguese trade with Japan were mutual; the daimyo of Kyushu were immediately responsive, and especially did they appreciate the virtues of the arquebus, long known simply as the 'Tanegashima weapon'.²⁸ There was also an eager demand for European novelties such as time-keepers, whether clocks, dials or hour-glasses, some fine textiles, and leather goods, as well as Chinese porcelain and other Asian luxury items. But commercially these were marginal: the great staple import was Chinese raw silk, superior to the home-grown and in great demand; later on were added fine silk stuffs and, in the 1590s, gold for Hideyoshi's wars. Exports included swords and other traditional Japanese lines such as lacquer work and, in the next century, copper for the gun-foundries of Goa and Macao; but the staple was silver to pay not only for the silk of China but also for the spices of the Southern Seas: the value of silver in relation to gold in Japan was a little below that in Europe but about twice that at Canton, and the Chinese demand for silver was apparently insatiable. After the initial curiosity had been met, there was little market for most European wares, and the Portuguese trade in the China Seas was essentially a carrying trade in Asian products; but with direct Sino-Japanese trade usually banned, and the silver: gold ratios what they were, this was a middleman's dream.²⁹

For the first few years of contact, trade was in the hands of private venturers coming to various ports of Kyushu, notably Hirado and Kagoshima. The daimyo were in active competition for Portuguese visits, which brought some prestige as well as material benefits; and along with the merchants came the missionaries. As a result of Xavier's brief mission and the work of such devoted and able successors as Luis Frois, a remarkable number of Japanese—as many as 150,000 by the early 1580s—became Christians, and very many of them far from merely nominal ones, as their steadfastness in fearful tortures and martyrdoms was to

show.³⁰ This notable success had political implications, and following Gibbon's example we may glance at some of its 'secondary causes'.

Initially, some Japanese seem to have thought that as Christianity was brought from India, it was only a new sect of Buddhism, and hence acceptable in a land of many such sects; conversely, and at a different level, Nobunaga, rising to power in the 1560s, was a bitter enemy of the great Buddhist monasteries, as recalcitrant and over-mighty subjects as any daimyo; one sect at least, the True Land (Jodo) had dangerously radical social tendencies.³¹ As a natural consequence Nobunaga showed some favour to the new faith. Christianity had a certain appeal to the poor and oppressed, who were offered new consolations and kindly attention by the Fathers, especially perhaps in the later Franciscan phase of mission activity; conversely again, there was an element of *cuius regio eius religio*, leading to mass conversions at the lord's behest. The 1584–6 'embassy' of young Japanese nobles, hand-picked by the Jesuits and carefully shepherded through their splendid receptions in Iberian and Italian courts and cities, was of course designed to such an end: the manipulation of an élite.³² While some daimyo, including for example Hideyoshi's very able and loyal general Konishi Yukinaga, became truly sincere Christians, others thought adherence to the foreign belief a small price to pay if Jesuit influence brought Portuguese shipping to their ports: 'In short, it was the Great Ship' from Macao 'which was the temporal mainstay of the Japan mission'.³³ It may well be, as Hall says, that to speak of 'The Christian Century in Japan' is really 'something of a Western conceit';³⁴ but, as we shall see, at several points Christianity impinged very significantly on Japanese external affairs, political and economic.

At both ends of the trade, the free-for-all did not long endure: 'after the Viceroy at Goa got wind of this new Eldorado, the voyage was placed on the usual monopoly footing under the control of a captain-major' of the China voyage from Goa and Malacca; until 1623 he was also captain-general of Macao while actually at the port, which in the interim was ruled by its own *Senado* or Council.³⁵ This Crown appointment was by way of reward for services, royal favour, or purchase, and in addition to the captain-major's own investment there were also sundry charges and commissions on consignments financed by various parties—Macao merchants, both Portuguese and Asian; the Jesuits, who would not have been able to finance their mission otherwise; Kyushu daimyo, and even Hideyoshi and Ieyasu. Naturally so lucrative a post or job was surrounded by much corruption, faction, and intrigue, and there were also of course occasional interlopers, licensed or illicit. After 1550 the China voyage was usually made by only one or two ships a year, presumably in the interests of the royal fisc; but these were great Indian-built teak carracks of 600 to 1600 tons, known to the Japanese as the *Kurofune* or 'Black Ships', a favourite and lively theme of Namban or 'Southern Barbarian' art.

At the other end, in Japan itself, the trade was not completely regularised until 1571; before that various ports were visited, sometimes on a political basis—the

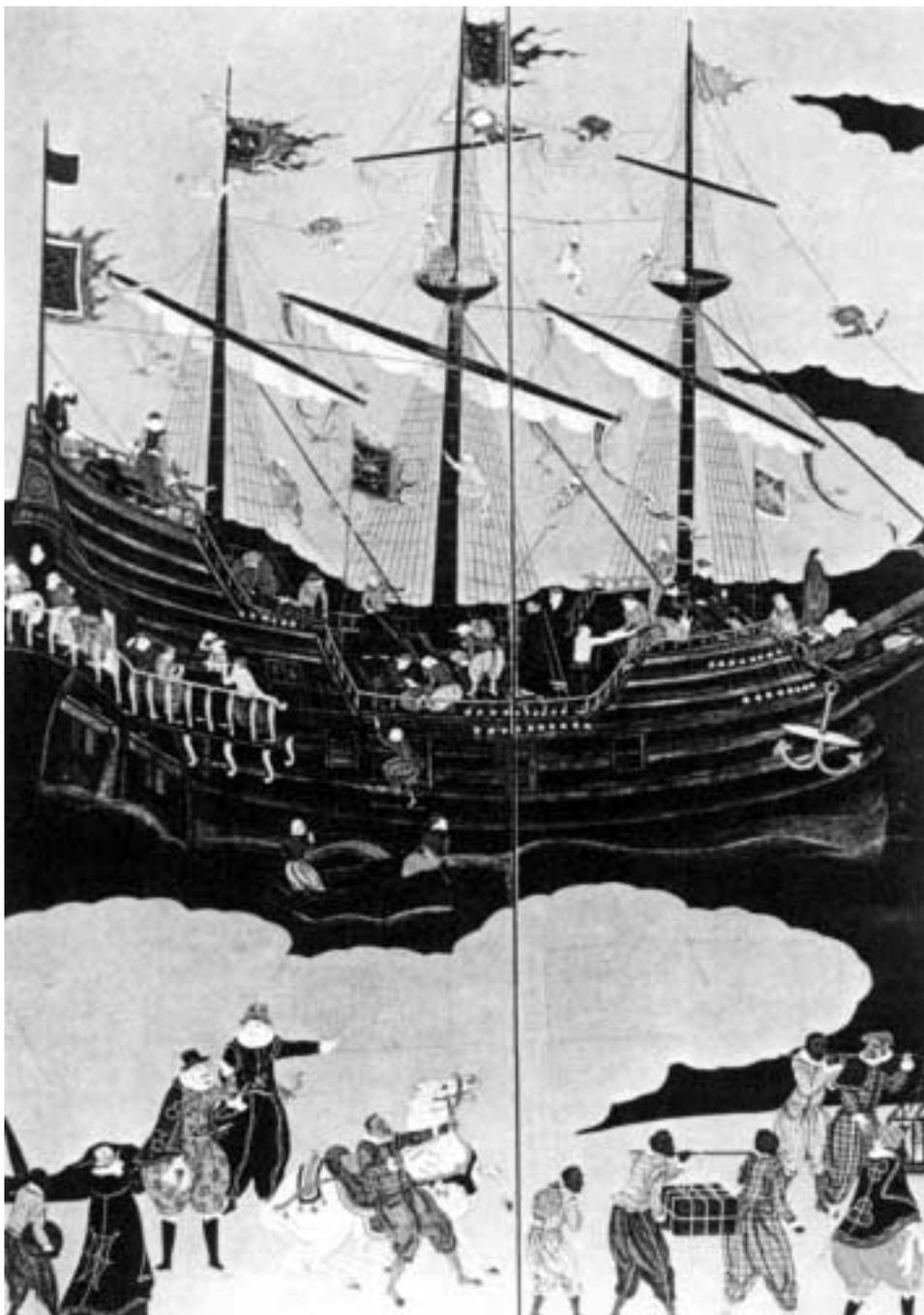


Plate XII. THE GREAT SHIP AT NAGASAKI. Japanese screen painting, reproduced in M. Cooper SJ (ed.), *The Southern Barbarians* (Tokyo 1971). By courtesy of Kobe Municipal Museum of Nanban Art.

Jesuits naturally tried to favour those daimyo who favoured them—but this was not conducive to stable trade relations. But the Christian daimyo Omura Sumitada offered an uninhabited peninsula on the first-class harbour of Nagasaki as a secure base, and by 1579 a Christian town of about 400 houses had grown up (Plate XII). Although authorities disagree as to whether there was an actual cession of land, in practice the Jesuit Superior nominated the daimyo's Governor from about 1580 until Hideyoshi took over the town some ten years later, and even then, after a decent spell, the Church regained an effective if discreet control.³⁶ The year 1571 saw, then, the founding of the port which for over two centuries from 1641 was to be the only licit point of contact between Japan and the outer world; it saw also the founding of Manila, the spearhead of attempted penetration of China and Japan by Portugal's rival Spain, and again for over two centuries the only licit point of contact between Pacific America and Asia.

The Philippines: dreams and realities

The reduction of the Philippines to Spanish rule was the work of men of the sword; the retention of rule was largely due to men of the Cross. Although King Philip's treasury paid heavily to establish and maintain the network of mission stations, their close supervision and moral domination of the country people helped a mere handful of Spaniards—never more than 5000 until the very last years of the régime—to maintain a hold over the scores of jungly and mountainous inhabited islands (Plate XIII).³⁷ Even so, that hold was at times precarious, and in the Muslim south never really complete and assured: although, after the occupation of a 'royal' village in 1578, Governor Sande officially annexed the whole of Borneo, even the treaty made three hundred years later (1876) with the Sultan of much smaller Jolo was 'written on water',³⁸ and Cross and Crescent remain in armed conflict to this day. The hispanisation of the Philippines by the Gospel was a continual drain on the royal treasury—only in 1701–31 was there a surplus, for the rest the administration was carried on by heavy subsidies from New Spain;³⁹ but the Galleon trade put much treasure into private pockets—not least into those of Philippine ecclesiastics.

Here indeed, in a vulnerable wedge between the farthest eastward penetration of an expanding Islam and the expansionist Japan of Hideyoshi, was the end of the world for Iberian expansion westwards. The Philippines were 'Spanish by the grace of New Spain, of Legazpi and Urdaneta, the true testamentary executors of the abortive dream of Columbus'.⁴⁰ It follows that the islands were the colony of a colony, and all through the voluminous reports to Spain run complaints of the alternate indifference and interference of the Viceroy in Mexico. These documents in the earlier volumes of Blair and Robertson give a wonderful view of the agitated intrigue, the tinsel grandeurs and real miseries of life in this small frontier pond, which was yet too close to mighty and mysterious Asian empires to be merely a backwater.

Each new Governor reports proudly that he has built or is building an efficient



galley fleet to cope with the Moros; each successor finds only a few rotting boats, or none. The Chinese traders and artisans—the ‘Sangleys’—are a constant problem: they bring poor shoddy silk and will take only gold and silver, making profits of 100 or 200 per cent; their cheap cottons ruin local crafts and drive the ‘Indians’ into laziness and vice; they force up prices. Yet we need them for the commodities they bring (including, after two decades of settlement, even food) and to carry on the artisan and retail trades that Spanish gentlemen cannot be expected to handle; and then there are doubtless vast possibilities in China, both for commerce and conversion. We ought to put down the infamous crime of sodomy that the Sangleys are said to perform on their ships, corrupting the simple Indians—‘but, since the punishment may hinder commerce, it will be necessary to observe moderation’ until your hard-pressed Majesty advises us. Between the Chinese and the Mexicans, the Manila merchants are squeezed out, and so much money is drained away. The widows of noble conquistadores marry beneath them to keep the *encomienda* in the family, which is a disgrace to civil society, bad for morale and morals. Church and State are often at loggerheads: Bishop Salazar, playing the *las Casas*, vehemently attacks the atrocious ill-usage of the Indians, but *per contra* officialdom alleges that ‘the friars make use of them by the hundreds . . . whipping them as if they were highwaymen’, and have ‘no grief or pity’. Manila has ‘not even a prison, and that under an *Audiencia*’. To get money for the urgently needed fortification of the city, Governor Dasmariñas monopolises the sale of playing-cards and imposes a 2 per cent property tax, but applying this to the clergy he incurs ‘the censure of the bull of the Lord’s supper’ and is excommunicated. He retorts that the clergy are ‘all better merchants than students of Latin’, and this is backed up by a list of consignors to Acapulco by the Galleon—all ecclesiastics or *Audiencia* officials. With under 600 Spanish citizens in 1599, the colony doesn’t really need an Archbishop and three Bishops and all their underlings—‘one is sufficient’. We may let an Archbishop have the last pungent word: Majesty in Madrid

should not enquire into the particular vices of Don Francisco Tello,
but should picture to yourself a universal idea of all vices, brought
to the utmost degree and placed in a lawyer: this would be Tello,
who is your Majesty’s governor in the Philippines . . .
he has not even an indication of a virtue.⁴¹

With all this, there was a great deal of vigour and panache. Legazpi died in August 1572, and his followers took far too seriously, given their scant resources, his boast that ‘we are at the gate’ of the great realm of China. Within eighteen months of his death, his notary Fernando Riquel was writing (January 1574)

◀ *Plate XIII.* MANILA AND LUZON, 1635. The distorted lineaments of Luzon are recognisable, but in contrast to Macao (Plate XI) the emphasis is on Manila as a fortress in the bush: unrealistic cartography, but a symbolism appropriate to the realities. From P. Barretto de Resende, *Livro do Estado da India Oriental*, Sloane MS 197, by permission of the Trustees of The British Library.

that the many very populous cities on the year's journey between Canton and Peking 'could be subdued and conquered with less than sixty good Spanish soldiers'—*con menos de 60 españoles buena gente*.⁴² Even assuming that a cipher has been dropped out, Tomé Pires, dying in a Chinese jail half a century earlier, could have told him better. It is a neat comment on these delusions of grandeur that before the year was out Manila itself nearly fell to the assault of a mere pirate.

This Cantonese sea-rover, Lin Ah Feng, or to the Spaniards Limahon, commanded some three score well-armed junks and was seeking a new base, having made the China coast too hot to hold him: his most prominent lieutenant was a Japanese. He landed near Manila on 29–30 November 1574, and his two assaults were beaten off only by very desperate fighting, and some luck. He retired to Pangasinan, some 175 km north of Manila, and set up a little kingdom, which in March 1575 was blockaded by land and sea by Juan de Salcedo, Legazpi's youthful grandson and the most notable conquistador of Luzon. During the blockade Salcedo met a Chinese warship under Wang-kaio ('Omoncon'), sent to track Limahon down. This was of course an excellent opportunity to open relations with China, and Wang agreed to take an embassy, led by Fray Martin de Rada, back to Fukien. Unluckily, Salcedo thought that Limahon was safely boxed up, and conducted a leisurely investment: the pirate was an abler man than the Spaniards accounted him and was able to build up a fleet of small craft from the remains of his fleet, burnt by Salcedo. At the beginning of August he slipped away, to meet an obscure end.

The result for the Fukienese embassy was disastrous: the Chinese suspected collusion. After an initially good reception, Rada and his companions were brought back to Manila by a Chinese mission, and there were further misunderstandings with the foolishly arrogant new Governor, Francisco de Sande. The Chinese wanted Limahon's head, or at least presents suitable to their rank; Sande could not produce the first and on a point of pique would not provide the second. The envoys agreed to carry Rada and another friar back to Fukien, but beached them in northern Luzon; and there was no further talk of the virtually promised Spanish base on the Bay of Amoy, the very site for which had been pointed out to Rada. Sande's reaction was an absurd antipathy and scorn for all Chinese, so that this very promising opening for friendly relations was replaced by crazy schemes of conquest—schemes which in their wild disregard of common-sense, let alone logistics, recall King Picrochole even more than Don Quixote.⁴³

There were tremors also in the south: Drake was at Mindanao and the Moluccas in 1579, and eight years later Thomas Cavendish sailed into San Bernardino Strait and right through the southern islands, as though the Spaniards were in the Philippines to no purpose.⁴⁴ These were mere premonitions; more immediate was the threat from the north. In 1580–1 a Japanese freebooter set up a base in Cagayan, in the north of Luzon, and was expelled in 1582 only after very hard fighting. Japan had been included, rather vaguely, among those neighbour

kingdoms whose conquest would be both pious and glorious, and perhaps easy, but more sober thoughts began to creep in: 'These occasions are not so much a matter of jest as they have been hitherto; for the Chinese and Japanese are not Indians' but as valiant as many Berbers 'and even more so'. Matters were to become even more serious from 1582, for in that year Nobunaga was assassinated, to be speedily avenged by his even abler general Hideyoshi. Hideyoshi's advent to power heralded an intensified drive towards consolidation in Japan, if not an end then at least a very marked limitation to the freedom of action of the Kyushu daimyo, and in due course a menacing expansionism. By 1593 any merriment was on the other side: 'The Xaponese laughed [and] said that the defence of these islands was merely a matter for jest. . . .'⁴⁵

In 1582 also news reached Manila and Macao of the forcible union in 1580 of the Portuguese and Spanish Crowns. A completely separate Portuguese administration in the Indies as well as in Europe was guaranteed by the Cortes of Thomar (1581), which accepted the Spanish takeover, and until late in the 'Sixty Years Captivity' the promise was honoured; nevertheless the change could not but lead to complications—commercial, political, religious, military. The ancient rivalry survived in the forced marriage, and was often very sharp indeed. Loyalty to a single Crown could not wish away the competition for the trading, and mission, rights in Japan.

Manila and Macao

The Galleon was more to Manila than even the Great Ship to Macao; the Portuguese had their carrying trade, and it would seem a more enterprising freelance element, and it was these that enabled Macao to adapt and survive even after the Dutch had blockaded the Malacca Straits and the Japanese had expelled them from Nagasaki.⁴⁶ Trans-Pacific crossings were almost annual from the foundation of Manila,⁴⁷ and in 1593 the Galleon trade was regulated at a normal two ships a year, practically in the form in which it was to persist until the end of Spanish rule in Mexico, except for a great increase in unit-tonnage—originally the ships were to be limited to 300 tons, but this, like so much else in Spanish regulations, was a dead letter almost from the start, and already by 1614 there were 1000-tonners.

The hope of tapping the spice trade from the Philippines soon dwindled away (although as late as 1579 Sande was still yearning after the Moluccas);⁴⁸ it became clear that economically only the China trade could justify the Spanish presence in the islands. The profits from Chinese silk could be enormous; it had to be paid for with silver, but here Mexico was a providence: 'The extraordinary luck of the Spanish Philippines was to be at the point of contact between two monetary systems, a world of dear silver and a world of cheap silver.'⁴⁹ But the silk, and the minor wares—porcelain, drugs, luxury craft-work—came to Manila in Chinese junks, and after 1604 also in Portuguese ships from Macao, and on this side the Spanish 'part in the trade was a stationary one', simply sitting

on a fine harbour splendidly situated to be a focus of shipping in the Southern Seas. But for two or three months of the year Manila was a chaos of shipping and forwarding.⁵⁰

The organisation of the Galleon trade was extraordinary: reading Schurz's chapter 'City and Commerce' one has almost the strange impression that the entire colony acted as both individual shareholders and managers of a joint-stock company; whence, naturally, some confusion.⁵¹ There was a *permiso*, or global quota of cargo, which throughout the seventeenth century was set at a value of 250,000 pesos; within this total all citizens had in theory the right to consign, in proportion to their wealth, on the King's ships, each person's entitlement being apportioned by a committee, the *junta de repartimiento*. In practice, the trade fell increasingly into the hands of a few active entrepreneurs, who bought up the *boletas*, or permits, of the small fry, a highly speculative affair. A large share was taken by groups such as the cathedral chapter and the *obras pias*, or charitable foundations, which ran orphanages, hospitals, and the like services. These, by their continuity of experience and policy, amassed large capitals and were able to act as bankers for the shippers, lending at anything from 20 to 50 per cent.

As well as securing his boleta from the junta de repartimiento, the consignor had to secure his goods from the commissioner of the *pancada*, the bulk-buying scheme which in theory handled all Chinese merchandise for export on the Galleon. When we add to this the normal complications of Spanish shipping and customs regulation, and the fact that the 250,000 pesos in Manila would (even officially) be worth 500,000 in Mexico, it will be seen that the system, like so much in the Spanish combination of bureaucratic control with private financing, was guaranteed to produce delays and corruption on every hand. The real value of the cargoes was always grossly in excess of the permiso, often several times greater. Everybody was in the racket: each seaman even was allowed to carry one chest, 'which had a most expansive capacity'; and the Chinese packers were artists in the compaction of the small-bulk high-value staples of the trade. The resulting overlading between and even on decks, often at the expense of space for necessary stores and gear, interfered with the working of the ships and was responsible for several wrecks; and the loss of a Galleon, by storm or capture, meant a ruinous year for the city. But the profits were enormous: officially set at a permissible 83 per cent, represented as a miserable 5 to 10 in Manileño petitions, inflated up to 1000 in jealous Dutch or English eyes, they ranged in actuality between 100 and 300 per cent.

The Union of the Crowns was only reluctantly accepted at Macao;⁵² although now officially brethren, Lusians and Castilians often behaved in less than fraternal fashion. It is an ironic comment on the Union that the Cabildo of Manila wrote to the King that the Audiencia should be suppressed since not only was it superfluous for seventy Spanish households in Manila and seventy in the rest of the islands (plus a few troops), but as they alleged, 'our Portuguese neighbours

cannot believe that it has been established for so few people' but 'imagine that it is . . . to overpower and govern them' and so 'have shut the door to the commerce, friendship, and intercourse which was commencing. . . .'⁵³

Naturally Manila (and Mexico) wanted to get into the direct China trade; equally naturally the Portuguese saw in this the complete ruin of their 'Eastern Yndias', and argued that Castille itself would suffer, since China would drain 'all the money and coin' from New Spain 'and none will go to Hespaña' (it must be remembered that Macao's silver came from Japan). This consideration carried weight in Madrid itself, so much so that in 1586 the King signed a decree prohibiting Mexican imports from China altogether, partly in the interest of cloth exports from the home country. The Viceroy of New Spain, Manrique, put up an able counter-argument and, more to the point, simply saw 'fit to disregard your Majesty's orders, until you direct me further'.⁵⁴ There was a Cabildo in Mexico City as well as in Manila, and trade with the Sangleys went on.

Rigid separation between the two Iberian spheres was more easily applied to the large and bureaucratically organised long-distance trades: the voyages of Francisco Gali in 1584 and João da Gama in 1589–90, direct from Macao to Acapulco, were exceptional and caused scandal. But the Macao-Manila silk trade was sufficiently profitable to both sides to survive repeated official bans, and it remained in Portuguese hands (so far as it was not in Chinese) despite the demand in 1586 by a junta of the leading officials and citizens of Manila that they should be allowed to 'make voyages to Japon, Macan, and all other kingdoms and posts, whether Portuguese or pagan'. The memorial of this junta is indeed a most remarkable document. Much of it deals with internal problems and is a level-headed and liberal reform program; all that is wrong is that for it to work successfully the Castilian leopards—officials, ecclesiastics, merchants, encomenderos—would have had to change their spots. The rest is a plan for the conquest of China, at least more realistic than Riquel's sixty stout soldiers: the forces needed would be 10–12,000 Spaniards and Portuguese, 5–6000 'Indians' from Visaya ('a spirited and sturdy people'), and 5–6000 Japanese, who might prefer to go in with the Portuguese, whom they knew already, and could be guided by the fathers of the Society of Jesus. Such large forces would be needed to overawe any thought of resistance; otherwise the Spaniards would win but, as they did in once-populated but now desert countries like Cuba, at the price of wrecking everything, including the 'so wonderful' Chinese government. In that case we shall lose 'our reputation and the bright hopes we now have of getting the port of Macan and a passage into Japon'.⁵⁵

This went into the discard; the one project of conquest that these forward-policy men-on-the-spot got away with was a confused and abortive adventure in Cambodia, an absurd dispersal of scanty forces when more than all available strength might well have been needed for defence against Japan.⁵⁶ The Manileños persisted in attempts to secure a base on the China coast, the Macaonese as persistently blocked them. The 'bright hopes' received their quietus in 1598–9,

when Cantonese officialdom had at last been persuaded to let the Spaniards settle 'in perpetuity' at 'El Pinal', somewhere between Canton and Macao. Far from co-operating in the conquest and conversion of China, the Portuguese informed the mandarins that the Spaniards were 'robbers and insurrectionaries, and people who raised revolts in the kingdoms they entered'; finding words not enough, they tried to expel their fellow-subjects and fellow-Christians by force of arms. They were staved off, but El Pinal was abandoned.⁵⁷

Already, however, the focus of rivalry had shifted to Japan, where nationalist, mercantile, and missionary motives were nicely compounded in a paradigm: Portingall: Castilian, Macaonese: Manileño, Jesuit: Franciscan.

Japan united

Oda Nobunaga began his career as a very minor baron, held in scant respect by his peers. He was lord of Owari at the head of Ise Bay, around the modern Nagoya, a small fief but strategically located between the ancient capital Kyoto and the largest lowland of Japan, the Kanto (Kwanto) Plain where Tokyo stands. The country was racked by the endless confused struggles of the warlords, for whom however Kyoto retained its mystique: ambitions could be legitimated by securing from the shadowy Emperor, through his little less shadowy Ashikaga Shogun, a commission doubtless disguised as for the defence of the realm against (other) over-mighty subjects, in practice to subjugate or destroy these rivals—a procedure far from unknown in medieval Europe. In 1560 Imagawa of Suruga, a much more potent magnate than Nobunaga, the lord of three provinces between Owari and Kanto, was moving on Kyoto to this end, across Nobunaga's territory. He had 25,000 men, Owari could muster a bare 3000: Imagawa saw no problem. Nobunaga surprised, routed, and slew him. By an adroit combination of political intrigue and war he then built up a power which enabled him to enter Kyoto itself in 1568, nominally in support of a claimant to the Shogunate, whom he formally installed in that dignity, only to depose him five years later.⁵⁸

Nobunaga's hegemony was far from undisputed, and his period of dominance was filled with much hard fighting, not least with the great Buddhist monasteries which sided with his enemies: these he crushed with great slaughter. By the time of his murder in 1582 he controlled, directly or through vassals, thirty-two of the sixty-odd provinces, and these centrally located in a belt from the borders of Kanto to the northern shores of the Inland Sea, the very heartland of Japan.⁵⁹ He had a rough military approach to civil affairs, but this was needed, and he had grasped the importance of sound administration. Under his rule the many tax barriers which compartmented the country were abolished, and the hold of the merchant guilds on internal trade was weakened by the favouring of free markets as service centres to the castles of himself and his vassals; Nobunaga asserted his authority over Sakai, but fostered the city in its role as a major source of armaments.⁶⁰ An innovator in tactics, making much use of arquebusiers, and in fortification, he also initiated policies later extended by Hideyoshi, notably a new

land survey and the disarming of the peasantry, far too much given, in these times of troubles, to agrarian risings. He also anticipated Hideyoshi in dreaming of the conquest of China. Basically an iron-hearted soldier, he had yet an enquiring mind which, perhaps as much as his hatred of the Buddhist monks and his taste for overseas luxuries, led him to listen courteously to the learned and tactful Jesuits.⁶¹

Remarkable as Nobunaga was, he was outclassed by his successors Toyotomi Hideyoshi and Matsudaira Motoyasu, the latter better known as Ieyasu, the first Tokugawa Shogun. They could be no less ruthlessly cruel on occasion, but were more prepared to use conciliation and finesse. The three are well summed up in their traditionary reactions to the caged bird that would not sing: Nobunaga—wring its neck; Hideyoshi—force it to sing; Ieyasu—wait till it sings.⁶²

Hideyoshi, Nobunaga's leading general, was unique amongst Japanese rulers in being of humble birth: in a rough European approximation, if Nobunaga began but little above the gentry, Hideyoshi's birth was little if at all above the yeomanry.⁶³ But, until in his latter years he overreached himself, he was a soldier and a politician of genius, who like Cromwell

Could by industrious Valour climbe . . .

And cast the Kingdome old

Into another Mold.⁶⁴

It is ironic that by his ruthless 'Sword Hunt', completing the disarming of the peasantry, and by his census, land survey, and other legislation, he froze the social structure of Japan into a hierarchy of closed classes, which lasted into Meiji days: warriors, peasants, artisans, merchants, conceptually and nominally in that order, though in the nature of things the peasantry soon sank to the bottom.

When one of his generals assassinated Nobunaga at Kyoto, Hideyoshi was away in the west of Honshu, engaged in the reduction of the Mori who dominated that area. He lost no time in patching up a truce and dashing back to the capital: within twelve days he had defeated and slain the murderer. Other leading generals were absent, Nobunaga's sons ruined their chances by fratricidal quarrelling, and Hideyoshi was able to control events. He called a meeting of notables and literally carried into them Nobunaga's baby grandson, who was proclaimed heir, with a council of four army leaders to run the country. Such an arrangement could hardly last, and it was not long before Hideyoshi as Regent began to concentrate power in his own hands. This of course meant more fighting, but by mid-1583 he controlled thirty provinces, and could operate on interior lines against Kyushu or Kanto at his choice. The most dangerous rival, Ieyasu, had kept aloof from events, but now took up arms with some success; but the two were realist enough to come to an honourable arrangement, and Hideyoshi was now free to complete Nobunaga's work of unification.

He had already a footing in Shikoku, which he subdued in 1585; in 1587 he took advantage of internal strife in Kyushu to compel the dominant lord of the

island, Shimazu of Satsuma, to come to terms. The Mori, who had helped in the tough Kyushu campaign, did not finally submit until 1591. By that time Hideyoshi and Ieyasu had together overrun the Kanto Plain, which was given to Ieyasu, who seated himself in Edo (today's Tokyo), in exchange for his three provinces of Mikasa, Totomi, and Suruga—the very three whence Imagawa had launched the entry into Nobunaga's lands in 1560, the beginning of the whole coalescence. In the still backward and peripheral north there was only one really powerful lord, Date Masamune, who submitted in 1590; Hokkaido was as yet, and long remained, a barbarous no-man's land. This apart, a common soldier's son was now master of all Japan.

The building of the great castle at Osaka, which was to overshadow Sakai as a commercial centre, set the seal on Hideyoshi's dominance; with the reduction of Kyushu and the taking over of Nagasaki, he was brought into more direct

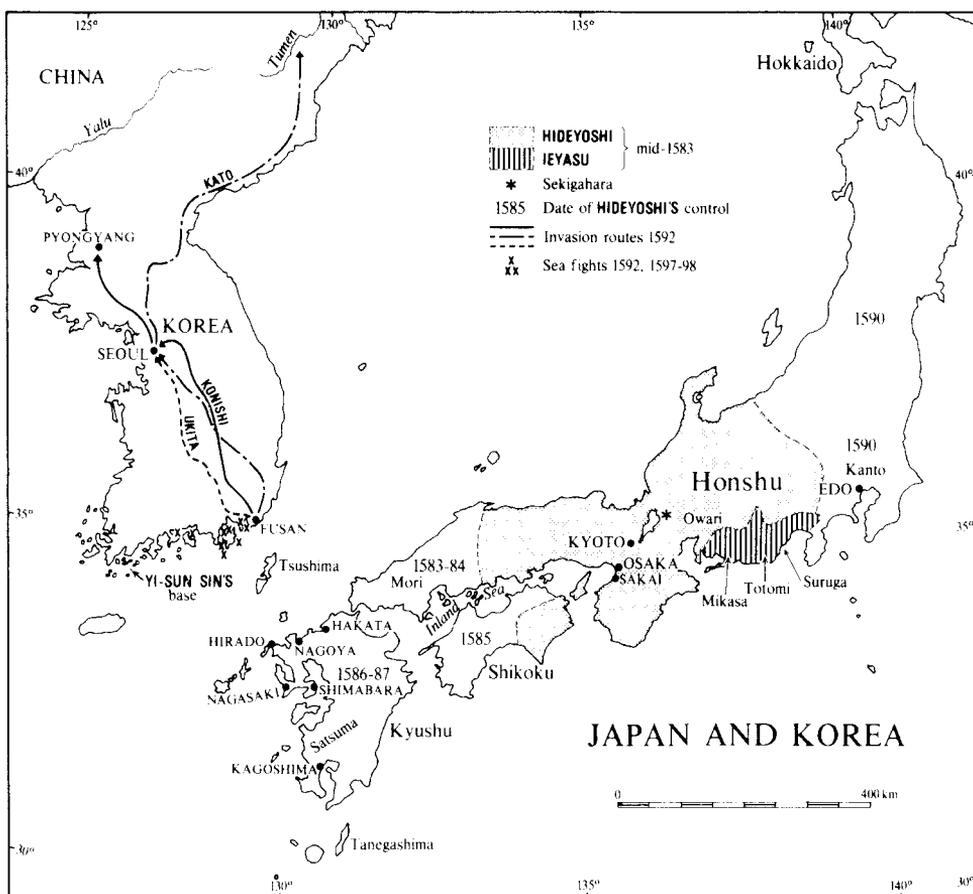


Figure 17. JAPAN AND KOREA. In the later sixteenth century. Based on maps in J. Murdoch, *A History of Japan* (London 1949), Vol. II, and A. L. Sadler, in *Trans. Asiatic Soc. of Japan* 2nd Ser. 14, 1937, 177–208.

touch with the Europeans. He could now think of asserting himself on a wider stage than the Japanese islands, and Macao and Manila were face to face not with a congeries of rival lordships but with a state which, however strange and composite its organisation—paradoxically, a sort of centralised feudalism—was yet comparable in real power with any European monarchy.⁶⁵ The resulting involvement of those European outposts with Japanese politics was to be fateful both for the expansion of Iberian Christendom and for the polity of Japan itself.

Hideyoshi and the Jesuits

Immediately, Hideyoshi's accession to power made little difference to Macao and the Jesuits; to them, probably, the warm welcome given to a storm-driven Spanish ship in 1584 by the daimyo of Hirado (losing trade to Nagasaki) may have seemed more ominous. Indeed, as the daimyo suggested that missionaries other than Jesuits would be well received, it was the first hint of a crack in their mercantile and religious monopoly. Only two or three years later the innocent maladroitness of the Jesuit Vice-Provincial, Gaspar Coelho, precipitated a crisis which, however, was bound to come fairly soon, given the rate of conversion among the western lords and their retainers, and the obvious danger of divided loyalties that this implied. *Cuius regio, eius religio* could after all go into reverse, and on a bigger scale.

In 1586 Coelho paid a courtesy visit to Hideyoshi at Osaka; the interview was cordial—as it turned out, too cordial. The Regent confided his plans for the invasion of Korea and China, asking for the aid of two Portuguese carracks. Anxious to please, and showing much less than the traditional subtlety of his Order, Coelho rashly agreed, and even proffered further Portuguese aid for the Korean war, though obviously he had no way of making good such promises. Worse, he went on to pledge—unasked—his influence to rally the Christian daimyo of Kyushu against Shimazu; just the interference in local politics that wiser Jesuit heads had always warned against. To Hideyoshi, here was clearly another over-mighty subject in the making, the more dangerous for his foreign backing. The Christian lords were horrified at Coelho's presumption, but Hideyoshi kept his own counsel, even granting the Jesuits privileges superior to those of the Buddhist priests, and Coelho nestled happily in his fool's paradise.⁶⁶

In July 1587 Hideyoshi was at Hakata after the Kyushuan victory, and here Coelho entertained him on shipboard.⁶⁷ To all appearance the party was a great success, and Hideyoshi went ashore with some of Coelho's Portuguese wine—which ironically may have incited rather than mollified him. In the middle of the night a shaken Coelho was roused by the Regent's couriers and presented with four extremely pointed questions about Jesuit and Portuguese activities, ranging from alleged forcible conversions, destruction of temples, and slaving, to the eating of useful animals like horses and cows. He made what reply he could, but during the day—25 July 1587—an edict was issued giving all Jesuit Fathers twenty days to leave Japan; but 'As the Great Ship comes to

trade, and this is quite different, the Portuguese can carry on their commerce unmolested'. A leading and actively Christian daimyo, Takayama Ukon, had already been stripped of his fief for refusing to recant.

Coelho temporised, pointing out that they could leave only by the Great Ship, not due to sail for some months, and this excuse was accepted; but the ban was strengthened and extended: all symbols of the Faith were prohibited, and all Japanese Christians were ordered to recant, or to suffer exile or death. Coelho now tried to incite armed resistance by the Christian lords and wrote to Goa, Macao, and Manila for armed succours; all of those he approached had much more sense than to comply, and his ecclesiastical superiors were furious at his ineptitude. Their cooler stance was justified: Hideyoshi took no serious steps to enforce expulsion, and only a handful of Jesuits actually left; the rest carried on, if less publicly than of old, though a quarter of their establishments were actually destroyed. Takayama had obviously been disciplined *pour encourager les autres*; but other leading converts, such as Konishi Yukinaga, soon to make a great name for himself in Korea, were even moved to the danger-spot of western Kyushu.

In fact, the Jesuits were considered (fallaciously, in their own opinion) as indispensable interpreters and intermediaries with the Macaonese traders, a factor of special importance when Hideyoshi was amassing supplies and wealth for the Korean project; as Father Alessandro Valignano put it, with gentle cynicism,

with this Great Ship, and with our doing them all these little favours, they deceive themselves, and they are nearly all of them convinced that if the padres were not here, the Japanese could not deal with the Portuguese, which opinion is of no small help to us at this juncture.⁶⁸

Valignano, who had taken the Japanese youths to Rome in 1582, was officially permitted to bring them back in 1590.⁶⁹ His earlier experience in Japan (when he had supported a policy of acculturation by the Fathers to Japanese ways), his tact, the splendour of his embassy and the presents it brought, put things back on the old footing, and Hideyoshi even defied 'his own prohibition by strolling through the gilded halls of the Juraku palace wearing a rosary and Portuguese dress'.⁷⁰

Nevertheless, a clear warning had been given. Coelho's good wine, missionary interference with the supply of girls for Hideyoshi's court pleasures, were trivial secondary factors, if factors at all; more important perhaps was the Regent's increasing tendency to arbitrary action on impulse, a resultant of success and power. But while it is true that 'The dictator who changed three and twenty daimyo from their fiefs in a single day' had no need to dissimulate in his earlier effusive display of friendship to the Jesuits, or 'to truckle to [the] petty lordlings' of Kyushu,⁷¹ it was just as certainly not at all irrational for him to see in the rapid advances of the new Faith the beginnings of a subversive fifth column.

This, the simple view of his volte-face, is surely the right one, and it explains amongst other things the singling out of one Christian daimyo only, Takayama Udon, as an example and a warning.

The real threat to the Jesuits, when it did come, came doubtless not by the intent but without doubt by the actions of their co-religionists and fellow-subjects, the Franciscans of Manila: the storm had blown over for the time, but a cloud was rising in the south. Before it reached Japan, however, Hideyoshi had plunged into his Korean campaign, the greatest Japanese overseas operation before the wars, in the same waters, of 1894–5 and 1904–5.

The Korean adventure

Narrowly considered, Hideyoshi's Korean war may seem to have but a tenuous connection with the Pacific at large; but its significance, if negative, was real enough. Immediately, it diverted Japanese attention from a known option to the south; longer-term, its failure seems to have implanted a distaste for expansion and outside contact, a factor in the eventual self-internment of the country. Simply as a strategic study, the war is of great interest, a preview of the Korean campaigns of 1894–5 and even 1950–3. The naval historian must lament the absence of Coelho's promised carracks, which could have tested their technical capacities against the Korean 'tortoise-boats', while a European eye-witness account would have been of inestimable interest.

Hideyoshi's main motive seems to have been a megalomaniac lust for glory: Korea in fact was to be but the bridge-head for the conquest of China, a belated *revanche* for Kublai Khan's attack on Japan through the peninsula, three centuries earlier. Secondary motives probably included the need to divert discontents stirred up by his tough land policies; to find employment for the masterless or landless warriors left over from the wars—the *ronin*, obviously a potentially dangerous group; and to secure trade without tribute, or even with tribute coming to Japan. The decision was not a sudden impulse; the project had been long in Hideyoshi's mind and may have been taken over from Nobunaga.⁷² Pretext was found in the Chinese refusal to extend facilities for trade by ships licensed under Hideyoshi's 'Red Seal', and in that of the Korean king to pay homage and tribute (he was of course already tributary to Peking); he warned Hideyoshi that to attack China would be like 'a bee stinging a tortoise', which was more true than tactful.⁷³ There were many minor irritations which could be blown up by either side into quarrels—the overlordship of the Ryukyus, piracy—and the diplomatic exchanges were complicated by local vested interests such as those of the daimyo of Tsushima (lying between Japan and Korea), the reasoned policy calculations of competent generals in the field such as Konishi and the unreasoned reactions of other warriors, and the inveterate if very natural tendency of the intermediaries to tamper with their instructions when these would obviously offend the recipient: one Chinese envoy, for example, when reporting to Peking habitually represented a Japanese desire for 'peace' as one for 'submission'.⁷⁴

A total of some 225,000 men were mobilised, with Nagoya (in Shikoku, not the modern city on Ise Bay) as the main and Tsushima as the advanced base; organisation was meticulous, and hundreds of craft, small and large, were assembled for transport—the one-time pirates of the Inland Sea found a new opening for their talents. The first three divisions, under Konishi Yukinaga, Kato Kiyomasa, and Kuroda Nagasama, numbered some 52,000. On 24 May 1592, aided by mist, Konishi made an unopposed crossing of the 75–80 km between Tsushima and Fusan (or Pusan, the chief southern port of Korea), which he took the next day. He was joined almost at once by Kato and Kuroda; the government of the country was in a miserable state, and the Japanese ‘swept through Korea like a swift wind blowing away dead leaves’; they were much aided by their possession of firearms, which the Koreans lacked.⁷⁵ By 12 June Konishi was in Seoul, having covered 440 km in under twenty days.

In the meantime, however, and almost simultaneously with Konishi’s occupation of the capital, the fatal errors in Japanese planning were revealed: the lack of an effective supreme command in the field, Hideyoshi remaining at home, and above all the neglect of sea power. The Korean Court seems not to have taken the threat seriously at first, but even had orders to oppose the crossing been issued, the naval commander at Fusan, Won Kiun, was so worthless that they might not have made much difference. Strategically poised in a group of islands near the southwest corner of the peninsula, however, was his colleague Yi-sun Sin, a man of a very different mettle, and this soon became apparent. The Japanese fleet contained a number of large ships built for war, but on the whole these seem to have been inferior to Korean and Chinese vessels. Probably the Japanese crews and some individual captains were as skilled seamen and sea-fighters as their opponents, and many of them must have had naval experience in Nobunaga’s blockade of Osaka (1578) and the Kyushu campaign; but there was no unified command. The squadron commanders were soldiers, and as in the land fighting they were inspired by intense rivalries; but the spirit of ‘marching to the sound of the guns’ was more hazardous at sea, faced as they were with an opponent with superior armament and very clear ideas on how to use it.

By contrast to the Japanese commanders, Yi-sun appears a professional—his achievement in fleet-building alone shows that—and he was an admiral of such resolution, intelligence, and power of leadership that in the second naval campaign (1597–8) the chief of the Chinese contingent served under him, which in view of the normal Chinese stance towards lesser powers would seem almost against nature. He had also the advantage of the ‘tortoise-boats’, which were novel to the Japanese although they did not, as is often implied, spring new-born from Yi-sun’s brain—they had a long prehistory in Chinese war-junks. Nor were they, as Ballard styles them, the Dreadnoughts of the time, though perhaps weightier than Sadler’s alternative of torpedo-boats.⁷⁶ They probably had some form of armour-plating, certainly a carapace-like deck studded with spikes to cripple the boarders on whom the Japanese relied too much—like another

Armada only four years earlier, their ships were crammed with troops. The offensive capacity of Yi-sun's ships depended on fire-power—guns (in cannon, as against small arms, they were ahead of the Japanese), fire-arrows, something like Greek fire—and their use of the ram has been generally much exaggerated; by and large, any ramming seems to have been largely incidental.

By 7 June, with Konishi well on the road to Seoul, the main Japanese naval forces were scattered among the numerous off-shore islands west of Fusan, where Yi-sun fell upon them: by 10 July, in seven tactically beautiful actions, he had shattered their flotillas in detail, destroying at least 160 substantial vessels. But by the beginning of September the remaining Japanese ships, still a formidable fleet, were concentrated under the fortifications of Fusan, now turned into a powerful base, and Yi-sun's attack was beaten off. Nevertheless, steady reinforcement and supply of the armies in Korea was made very difficult, and these armies had now to meet counterattack from across the Yalu River.

On 15 July Konishi had taken Pyongyang, and the Korean king had fled to the banks of the Yalu, appealing for aid to his overlord in Peking. In October a small Chinese force was trapped and nearly destroyed in Pyongyang itself, while on Konishi's right Kato had advanced into northeastern Korea, at one point crossing the Tumen into what is now Manchuria. But the Koreans were recovering from their initial collapse; not all their provincial governors were incompetents, some rallied forces and achieved local successes, aided (despite Japanese efforts at conciliatory administration) by a strong guerrilla movement. Resistance throughout the country was hardening, while the alarming naval news from the south weakened the morale of the more thoughtful Japanese leaders. Despite his successes, Konishi accepted a truce. The Chinese were now taking the invasion more seriously, and when they struck again, in February 1593, it was in such force that Konishi had to withdraw to Seoul. Kato fought his way down from the northeast to join him, and together they defeated the Chinese in fierce fighting. But the pressure continued, and in May they felt forced to abandon Seoul pending negotiations, and retreated, unhampered by the Chinese, to a fortified zone covering Fusan.

Hideyoshi was far from disheartened. By this time he seems to have lost touch with reality, and apart from a peace party led by Konishi (and it had to be very cautious) his courtiers did little to help him regain it. He had still a bridge-head in Korea (Konishi realistically saw little point in the half-way policy of hanging on to it), and although the Chinese had virtually left the Koreans out of the war and the negotiations, they themselves had left only a small garrison in Seoul. The Chinese terms for peace included a demand (doubtless much softened in the presentation) that Hideyoshi should be invested by the Chinese Emperor as King of Japan; he countered with demands for the southern provinces of Korea, resumption and extension of the 'Red Seal' trade, and the hand of the Emperor's daughter. Negotiations dragged on in an atmosphere of intrigue and arrogance on both sides, with the diplomats tempering their principals' demands

to the point of deceit. The moment of truth came at the end of 1596, when a Chinese embassy actually brought over the robes for Hideyoshi's investiture as a vassal. A milder man might have exploded as he did.

The war began again in March 1597, but in a different atmosphere from that of 1592. At least the naval lesson had been learnt on one side, lost on the other; Yi-sun had been dismissed through palace intrigue, and his fleet allowed to decay. Won Kiun was in command again and Konishi, now a general at sea, had no difficulty in soundly beating the drunkard who had fled from the first encounter five years before. On land the Japanese advanced with less speed and drive than previously, until in January 1598 they were forced back by new Chinese armies. There were very bitter battles north of Fusan, the Japanese more than holding their own: Konishi bore much of the brunt, surely one of the great subordinate commanders of history. The impasse was resolved in October, when news arrived of Hideyoshi's death on 15 September: there was now no point in staying. But Yi-sun had been recalled and with a reorganised navy he fell upon the retreating squadrons: the Japanese got away with very heavy losses, perhaps half their ships and men. Yi-sun himself was killed in the thick of his last battle.

The Korean war was as futile as any in the long grim competition of futile dynastic wars. It had however some useful economic effects in Japan itself. Korean captives contributed notably to the excellence of Japanese ceramics, one group brought over by Shimazu developing the famous Satsuma ware; more important was the great expansion in ship-building and allied industries.⁷⁷ Politically, the absence from the story of Ieyasu's name is significant: that wary prince sent a small force to Nagoya, but himself sat out the war safely in Kanto, biding his time, which was very near: as in 1582, he could wait for the bird to sing.

The relevance of the war to Pacific history is that it helped to settle the geostrategic position of Japan for over two and a half centuries, estopping a very likely development of incalculable effect. Without the war, it seems all but certain that Hideyoshi would have struck south, to the Philippines. It is inconceivable that the small Spanish forces there, barely beating off Limahon, incapable of definitively subjugating Mindanao and Jolo, with little effective naval power, could have withstood the assault of even a third of the highly organised forces committed to Korea. With the metropolitan base so close and so populous, the manpower would have been available for an easier and more complete subjugation of the local peoples than that achieved by the Spaniards. By the time the Dutch and English arrived in any strength—like the Iberians, at the extreme range of their effective action—the Japanese would have been perfectly capable of meeting them on more than equal terms, and borrowing from them what they needed to adapt to a more open polity. It is easy to envisage, with Ballard, 'a fleet of Japanese 74's dominating the whole Western Pacific'.⁷⁸ The statesmen of mercantilist Europe would have had ample cause to thank God for Hideyoshi's folly, had they known of it. Setting aside any

might-have-beens, the Franciscans who came from Manila to Japan in the 1590s were playing with fire; some of them all too literally.

Hideyoshi and the Philippines

The Jesuits had pulled in their horns after Coelho's disastrous gaffe; guided by Valignano they had recovered lost ground, but its retention depended on continued discretion. Valignano argued cogently for one single control in the Japanese mission field—naturally, that of the Society of Jesus—and in 1585 he procured a papal bull confirming the Jesuit monopoly. The ardent Franciscans of Manila were not to be deterred by this embargo, and they were backed by more mercenary interests in the Philippines.⁷⁹

Soon, however, the Jesuits were hoist with their own petard, in the shape of one of their converts, Harada (Farada in Spanish documents). This man was a Sakai merchant who had traded in the Philippines; in 1591 he and others proposed to Hideyoshi an invasion of the islands, but the eve of the Korean war was hardly a propitious time, and instead a relative of Harada was entrusted with a message for the Governor, Gomez Perez Dasmariñas. This document, most beautifully and elaborately packaged, was less pleasing in content: it contained a demand for an embassy, on pain of such a conquest that 'that country shall repent'. Dasmariñas, startled as he was, and understandably suspicious of an 'ambassador' of such lowly status (who was also the only available translator), replied tactfully, making these points but promising to refer the matter to Spain. In the meantime, to 'show willing', he sent a Dominican, Father Juan Cobo (presumably chosen as being a Chinese expert) to make and to receive further explanations.⁸⁰

Nothing positive came of Cobo's mission: he did not even report, being lost on Formosa on his return voyage. It had however some awkward negative results: an increase of Spanish-Portuguese tension, and probably the strengthening of latent suspicions in Hideyoshi's mind. Cobo did not contact the Jesuits, who if not anxious to help could at least have interpreted more reliably than Harada, but instead joined with a couple of disreputable Spanish merchants with grievances against the Portuguese. Their complaints led to some renewed action against the Jesuits in Nagasaki, but this soon blew over. Cobo is also said to have shown Hideyoshi a globe, pointing out the wide spread of Philip II's realms.⁸¹

Harada now took the game into his own hands, himself carrying to Manila a second letter from Hideyoshi. This was more than explicit:

Formerly I was an insignificant man . . . but I set out to conquer this round expanse under the sky, and those who live beneath the sky upon the earth are all my vassals . . . [Korea refused homage and is conquered] The kings of other nations are not as I . . .

Thou shalt write the following at once to the king of Castilla:

'Those who insult me cannot escape. . . .'

Dasmariñas stalled for time—if the Japanese could be amused for four years, Manila might then be ready for them, though as the required force was estimated

at 1517 men, this may reasonably be doubted. In May 1593 the Governor sent a second embassy of Fray Pedro Bautista and three other Franciscans: this was in breach both of Japanese decrees and of the bull of 1585 (as the Jesuits did not fail to mention), but was supposedly justified by the claim that the Fathers were going as government envoys rather than as missionaries. The real mischief was that the shady Harada had fraudulently represented that Hideyoshi, and indeed the whole country, positively desired the Franciscans, and with this encouragement a steady trickle of friars went to Japan. Hideyoshi had, it is true, warmly welcomed the embassy; but in religious matters he was a *politique* to the marrow, and his real desire for it was as 'a bait for the Manila traders in the same way as the Jesuits were considered to be part and parcel' of the Macao trade.⁸² With the fiscal strain of the Korean war, any competition between traders was welcome.

The Franciscan embassy also gave Hideyoshi an opportunity to exercise what was for him diplomacy: his next letter (1594) reads like Marlowe's Tamburlaine—at his birth the sun had shone on his breast, portending his destiny, which was nothing less than that all kingdoms must bow down at his door or be destroyed. Gomez Perez Dasmariñas had been killed by his Chinese rowers on an expedition to the Moluccas, and the task of replying fell to his son Luis, assisted by a full council of war: with the omission of a lesson on cosmogony in the first draft, the letter as sent was a masterpiece of polite hedging.⁸³ There was a lull in the exchanges, but it was the proverbial lull.

The storm broke in 1596. The four friars had stayed on in Japan and had been allowed to preach in Kyoto; at least in his relations with Hideyoshi, Bautista was tactful. It is however clear, even if we assume some Jesuit exaggeration, that the friars were far from content with Valignano's cautious (and temperamentally sincere) policy of adapting so far as possible to Japanese ways; after all, they had been used to dealing with submissive 'Indians', not proud and sophisticated daimyo. They also appealed more directly to the poor and oppressed than did the Jesuits, and in general the sons of St Francis behaved in a far more forthright and uncompromising way than those of Loyola. Their flouting of Hideyoshi's bans became more and more flagrant; but for the time being he had other preoccupations, and in July 1596 Antonio de Morga could write to Philip II, in all innocence, that 'Xapon is kept quiet by the presence of the Franciscan religious whom we have there.'⁸⁴ But the situation was highly unstable, and in October it was brought to a head by a chance happening, the wreck of the Acapulco-bound Galleon *San Felipe* on Shikoku.⁸⁵

The cargo was very rich, and the local daimyo and his samurai seized most of it—as Boxer remarks, 'the coastal inhabitants of any European country would have done the same.' The Spaniards naturally appealed to Kyoto, using the good offices of Fray Juan Bautista rather than those proffered by the Jesuits, who were after all mostly Portuguese. The Japanese intermediaries double-crossed the claimants; between the demands of the war and the losses caused by severe earthquakes, Hideyoshi was in financial straits, and accepted the suggestion that he should confiscate this gift from the sea. (He might after all have cited, had he

known of it, a tactless precedent—Elizabeth’s legal but scarcely moral seizure of the Spanish treasure forced into her ports in 1568.) It is possible also that his suspicions were roused by the Spanish pilot who, in a natural desire to assert the powerful backing he might expect, is said to have displayed on a map the worldwide empire of his own sovereign, and have added that the religious were used as an advance-guard to soften up the King of Spain’s prospective vassals. The similarity to the story told of Cobo is suspicious.

Be this as it may, it is certain that Hideyoshi’s suspicions were aroused, and inflamed by the go-betweens and others around him; after all, he had given a clear warning to Coelho and Takayama Ukon, but had then held his hand; and now his reward was a reckless defiance of his commands. No ruler of his time could have been expected to accept such a situation. Even so, his wrath was discriminating. Presumably because after the *San Felipe* affair trade prospects with Manila were dim, and hence Macao’s must be nursed, the Jesuits were still exempt from extreme measures, save for three Japanese lay-brothers mistakenly included in the mass crucifixion at Nagasaki on 5 February 1597. On that day six Franciscans and seventeen of their converts suffered; Morga prints a moving letter from the friars, warning that Hideyoshi, ‘his appetite whetted by what he has stolen from the *San Felipe*’ plans to take the Ryukyus, Formosa, then Manila: the letter is subscribed ‘On the road to the gallows’.⁸⁶

Further and greater persecutions were to face the Christians of Japan, but not at Hideyoshi’s hands, although he did finally order the expulsion of all but a handful of Jesuits, an order again generally evaded. In August 1597, feeling his death near, he appointed a Regency council of five on behalf of his four-year-old bastard Hideyori; Ieyasu was not one of the five, but was asked to be guardian of the child: an arrangement not likely to be any more viable than the council Hideyoshi had himself subverted after Nobunaga’s murder. In September 1598 Hideyoshi—and Philip II—died. Factional intrigues soon began; by 1599 Ieyasu had pledges of support from so many daimyo that he was able to occupy Osaka castle. A ‘western alliance’ was formed against him, but was itself riddled with faction, and in the great battle of Sekigahara it was utterly defeated: among those executed after the fighting was the gallant Konishi Yukinaga. A few days later Ieyasu was again in Osaka, nominally acting for Hideyori, in practice master of Japan.

Sekigahara was fought on 20 October 1600. Exactly seven months earlier a small, battered ship, with only a quarter of her hundred-odd crew still alive, was towed by the local boatmen into a small harbour of Kyushu. She had come by the Straits of Magellan, her pilot was an Englishman, but she herself was Dutch: the *Liefde* (‘Love’ or ‘Charity’!). Only seven weeks after Sekigahara, Oliver van Noort and Antonio de Morga were locked in a bitter sea-fight in the approaches to Manila Bay. More than the spectacular forays of Drake and Cavendish, the arrival of the Dutch heralded the end of the Iberian monopoly of the world, as distinct from the local, trade of the Spice Islands and the China Seas.